

Feldman, Brian (USANYS)

From: Kelliher, Brian D [IMCEAEX-_O=INS_OU=IRM_CN=RECIPIENTS_CN=BRIAN+20D+20KELLIHER@HQ.DHS.GOV]
Sent: Friday, October 15, 2004 5:13 PM
To: Rosenberg, Ron M
Subject: Arar press

DemocracyNow.org

Friday, October 15th, 2004

Amnesty Calls for Release of Syrian Canadian Jailed in Damascus for Over 2 Years

As a judicial inquiry into the deportation of Canadian citizen Maher Arar continues largely in secret in Canada, concern is building for another Syrian-Canadian being held in Damascus: Arwad Al-Boushi. We speak with Alex Neve, the secretary-general of Amnesty International Canada. [includes rush transcript]

As a judicial inquiry into the deportation of Canadian citizen Maher Arar continues largely in secret in Canada, concern is building for another Syrian-Canadian being held in Damascus.

Maher Arar was detained by U.S. officials last year during a stopover in a New York airport. U.S.-officials secretly deported him to Syria where he spent 374 days in a Damascus prison without charges. This is some of his account of what happened when he arrived in Syria.

Maher Arar, describing his torture in Syria.

Amnesty International is now calling for urgent action in the case of Arwad Al-Boushi. He's the last of four Syrian Canadians arrested and jailed after 9/11 to remain behind bars in Syria.

Alex Neve, secretary-general of Amnesty International Canada.

AMY GOODMAN: But first, what constitutes a Canadian-al Qaeda connection. As a judicial inquiry into the deportation of Maher Arar continues, largely in secret in Canada, concern is building for another Syrian Canadian being held in Damascus. Mr. Arar was on a stopover in New York in 2002 when he was detained by U.S. officials claiming he had links to al Qaeda. The computer engineer was deported to Syria even though he was carrying a Canadian passport. When Maher Arar returned to Canada more than a year later, he said he had been tortured and forced to falsely confess to involvement in Islamic extremist activities. This is some of his account of what happened when he arrived in Syria.

MAHER ARAR: About six or seven Jordanians were waiting for us over there. They blindfolded me and they put me in the van. One or two minutes later, they just started beating me in the van, especially on the back of my head. They made me bend my head like this in the back. And they started beating me again and again. They would stop for a couple of minutes, they would resume beating me again, and it was just awful. And they didn't tell me anything why they were beating me. If I started -- if I wanted to say anything, if I tried to say anything, they would just beat me again, and I just kept silent.

AMY GOODMAN: That was Maher Arar. Now Amnesty International is calling for urgent action in the case of another Syrian Canadian, Arwad Al-Boushi. He is the last of the four Syrian Canadians arrested and jailed after

9/11 to remain behind bars in Syria. Alex Neve is Secretary-general of Amnesty International in Canada. He's in our Ottawa studio. Welcome to "The Current"/Democracy Now! simulcast.

ALEX NEVE: Thank you.

AMY GOODMAN: It's good to have you us with. Let's start off by telling us who is Arwad Al-Boushi.

ALEX NEVE: Arwad Al-Boushi is a 45-year-old Syrian Canadian. He left Syria about 23 years ago, so 1980-1981, and since that time has spent the intervening years living primarily in Saudi Arabia, but a significant chunk of time in Canada, as well, where he was first a permanent resident of this country and then eventually was granted citizenship. He has other family. He has a brother who lives in Canada as a citizen, as well. He's an engineer and was living in Saudi Arabia working as an engineer, and in July 2002, made his first trip back to Syria since leaving in 1981. He went back because his father was critically ill. His elderly parents both were still living in Syria. He had made inquiries through a variety of different avenues as to whether it would be safe for him to go back. He was concerned that he not face imprisonment or other forms of human rights abuse, was assured through the various inquiries that he made, including through a Syrian embassy -- he had family members in Syria making inquiries with government officials there -- that things would be fine, but unfortunately, he was arrested in the airport upon his arrival in Damascus. And two and three or four months later -- two years and three or four months later now, he remains in detention.

AMY GOODMAN: What are the charges against him?

ALEX NEVE: It's not a clear, one -- if there's a number of significant human rights concerns that arise in Mr. Al-Boushi's case, but one is he is simply not being treated in accordance with minimum fair trial standards, which, of course, would include clear public acknowledgement of what the charges are against you, a fair opportunity to respond to those charges, to be represented by a lawyer, et cetera. It appears that the charges relate to allegations that he was involved in a Syrian political party way back when he used to live in Syria, so this is going, 23, 24, 25 years back into history, a group called the Muslim Brotherhood. And that is a banned political movement in Syria. It has been for several decades. Amnesty International has frequently expressed concern that individuals who are either known to be members of the Muslim Brotherhood or suspected to be so do face serious human rights violations, including unfair trials, including arbitrary lengthy detention and imprisonment and the use of torture, incommunicado detention and other forms of imprisonment which clearly violate international norms.

AMY GOODMAN: How is he being treated right now in prison? What do you know?

ALEX NEVE: Well, we don't know anything for sure because no one is getting the kind of access to him that would give us the answers to these questions, but there are credible reports emerging that Amnesty International has heard from a number of different sources, that he has experienced torture in detention, that he has been held in solitary confinement, in incommunicado detention probably for quite a lengthy period of time, and that he was subjected to a grossly unfair trial of some description probably over a year ago in front of a military tribunal of some description in which he was not represented by counsel, in which he certainly would not have had any fair opportunity to defend himself against whatever allegations were brought forward. And the outcome of that trial isn't even certain. His family doesn't know for sure, the Canadian government doesn't know for sure what his term of imprisonment has been. There has been some rumors that it was eight years, some that it was seven years, some that it's been as long as twelve years. That in itself is a gross indication of how unfair these proceedings are. Surely at the very least, people should know what the punishment has been.

AMY GOODMAN: Now, his wife has seen him?

ALEX NEVE: Not his wife. His mother has.

AMY GOODMAN: His mother.

ALEX NEVE: Beginning in around July of this year, so about two years after he was first arrested, the Syrians have agreed to allow his mother to have monthly visits with him. Those visits don't happen in private. There's a Syrian guard present at all times. So, there has been no opportunity for any kind of frank exchange, such as have you been tortured, how you have been treated, and be able to get an honest answer to that question.

AMY GOODMAN: So, what is the Canadian government, given that he's a Syrian Canadian, doing about this?

ALEX NEVE: Canada has had two or three consular visits with him, but it's our understanding that since July, so for the last three or four months, that consular access has been denied by the Syrian government. These cases of dual nationality always become problematic. Syria is, of course, saying he's also Syrian, and we are detaining and holding him as a Syrian, and therefore, thank you very much for your concern, Canada, but you really have no business here. But he was traveling on a Canadian passport. He clearly had severed all of his links to Syria. His effective nationality, the nationality under which he was living was Canadian, and he absolutely needs to be treated as such. So, we're urging Canada to be much more forceful than they have been in pressing Syria to recognize that he really is first and foremost a Canadian, that Canada needs to have access to him, and that Canada is deeply, deeply concerned about the nature of the treatment he has possibly experienced, and the flawed, deeply flawed nature of the legal proceedings that have been used.

AMY GOODMAN: And is his family here speaking out?

ALEX NEVE: Up to this point in time, they have been fearful to do so, fearful for a variety of reasons including the fact that although his father has since died, who was critically ill, of course, at the time when he went back to Syria, his elderly mother is still alive and in Syria, and they have felt very nervous about not wanting to speak out in ways which would put her in any kind of jeopardy. Very understandable concern. They are now reaching a point now, though, where it's been more than two years where nothing seems to be happening. Where they, I think, have some concern that Canada isn't doing as much as they would like to see Canada do to defend his rights. And are now at a point where they feel prepared to go public.

AMY GOODMAN: Hmm. Alex Neve. I want to thank you very much for being with us. Secretary-general of Amnesty International in Canada, speaking to us from Ottawa. This is Democracy Now! and "The Current," in this unprecedented simulcast, as we broadcast throughout the United States and Canada, and online at democracynow.org.

Toronto Star
Oct. 15, 2004. 01:00 AM

Arar recalls turmoil of his arrival in Jordan

Suspects he was held in secret U.S. facility

Documents support idea of American role
MICHELLE SHEPHARD
STAFF REPORTER

Ottawa—When Maher Arar arrived in Amman, Jordan, with his U.S. escort in the early hours of Oct. 9, 2002, he says he was blindfolded and chained by six or seven men and forced into a van.

About 45 minutes later, he arrived at an unknown building where authorities spoke only Arabic. He could sense being taken to different rooms and going up and down in an elevator.

Twice, his blindfold was removed, once during questioning and then when he was left alone in a cell with a sponge mattress and the Qur'an, Arar recalled yesterday.

He still doesn't know where he was taken that day in 2002, but in light of a report this week claiming a top-secret CIA facility is operating in Jordan, the 34-year-old Syrian-born Canadian engineer wonders if this might be where he was sent before being surrendered to Syrian officials.

"It's very strange to find prisons with elevators in the Middle East. This place was not like the Syrian prisons," he said.

Arar was detained in New York on Sept. 26, 2002 on his way home to Canada from a vacation in Tunisia. He was held in U.S. custody on suspicion of having alleged links to Al Qaeda, before being flown in a private jet to Jordan. After a day in custody there, he was driven to Syria.

He says he was questioned and tortured for almost two weeks, then held without charges for a year. Documents acquired by Ottawa researcher Ken Rubin through an Access to Information request appear to support Arar's suspicion that he was in U.S. custody while detained in Jordan.

A briefing note outlining the Arar case to the minister of foreign affairs, dated December, 2002, states the Syrians took Arar into their custody, where he was "accompanied by U.S. and Jordanian officials."

It's believed to be the first indication Arar was still with U.S. officials before being handed over to the Syrians. Rubin also received, on behalf of Arar, a "draft workplan" prepared by the Security Intelligence Review Committee probing the actions of the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS) in the Arar matter.

A federal inquiry is now under way to determine the role of Canadian officials in Arar's arrest and deportation. Since the invasion of Afghanistan there has been much speculation about the U.S.'s detention of terrorism prisoners at facilities outside the U.S. and Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. This week, a Human Rights Watch report entitled, Disappeared: The CIA's Long-Term 'Ghost Detainees,' again sparked controversy.

A federal court has granted lawyer Dennis Edney of Edmonton the right to sue the government for allegedly violating the charter rights of Toronto-born Omar Khadr, 18, accused of having links to Al Qaeda. The teen has been detained at a U.S. prison camp at Guantanamo Bay for the last three years.

Brian D. Kelliher
Refugee & Asylum Law Division
Office of the Chief Counsel
U.S. Citizenship & Immigration Services (USCIS)
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
20 Massachusetts Avenue, NW, Suite 4025
Washington, DC 20529

(b)(2)(low) tel: [REDACTED]
Brian.Kelliher@dhs.gov